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ABSTRACT

The number of international students on college campuses is increasing rapidly. It has been projected that as many as one million such students will be attending United States colleges and universities by the turn of the century. Most research on international students has been descriptive, has focused on problem areas, and has studied these students in general. This study explores differences in the needs and perceptions between male and female international undergraduate students. Incoming international undergraduate students (N=96) attending a required fall orientation at the University of Maryland, College Park, completed a questionnaire on their background, perceptions, and needs. Subjects included students from Asia (54%), the Middle East (20%), Europe (10%), Latin America (5%), Africa (4%), and other (6%). To investigate sex differences, 43 items related to perceptions and 25 items related to career and academic needs were analyzed using multivariate analysis. The results revealed that females expected to have a harder time than most students at the university and that they were more easily discouraged than were males. Males were more likely than females to see themselves as leaders and males also viewed themselves as acting more strongly on things they believed in than females. Females expressed a greater need to talk to a counselor for career planning, and indicated greater needs for improving note taking and classroom speaking than males. These results have implications for both program planning and research concerning international students. (ABL)

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NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE AND MALE INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Jeanne E. Manese, William E. Sedlacek & Frederick T.L. Leong

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SUMMARY

Ninety-six incoming international undergraduate students attending a required fall orientation at the University of Maryland, College Park, completed a questionnaire on their background, perceptions and needs. Results indicated that females expected to have a harder time than most students at the University and they were more easily discouraged than were males, while males were more likely to see themselves as leaders than were females. Males also viewed themselves as acting more strongly on things they believed in than did females. Females expressed a greater need to talk to a counselor for career planning, and indicated greater needs for improving note taking and classroom speaking than males did.

Implications of the results for program planning and research concerning international students are discussed.

Research interest in international students has been increasingly evident among faculty, administrators and student personnel professionals. This greater attention probably can be linked to the dramatically growing numbers of international students on American college campuses. According to the annual census by the Institute of International Education (IIE), more than 325,000 persons holding foreign student visas were enrolled in U.S. post-secondary institutions in the academic year 1981-82 (Boyan, Julian, & Rew, 1982). It has been projected that by the end of the century there may be more than one million international students in the United States (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983),

Much of the research has investigated international students in general, has been descriptive, and has focused on their probems in areas such as academic performance, adjustment to the U.S., and non-return to the home country (Lee, Abd-Ella, & Burks, 1981; Perkins, Perkins, Guglieimino, & Reiff, 1977). According to the literature, top ranking problems commonly cited include lack of English proficiency, inadequate financial resources, social life adjustment, problems in daily living, and loneliness/homesickness (Lee, et al., 1981).

However, while the studies conducted on international students' problems have undoubtedly provided important information, several research shortcomings have been cited. Lee et al. (1981), in their comprehensive review of the literature and research, suggested that research on the needs and perceptions of international students was lacking. Furthermore, the results of their research suggested the importance of investigating subgroups, e.g, by sex, class standing, regional origin, etc. within the diverse international student population. Perkins et al. (1977) asserted there was a need for more sophisticated statistical analysis in research concerning international

students. While these authors agreed that descriptive studies using percentages were helpful, they pointed out that the use of percentages alone could result in misleading conclusions when comparisons were made between groups.

Published studies on sex differences among international students are very limited and show mixed results. Porter (cited in Lee et al., 1981) found that females reported having more problems than males, but Collins (cited in Lee et al., 1981) found just the opposite. Sex was not shown to be relevant in predicting attitudes about seeking professional psychological help (Dadfar & Freidlander, 1982), and Lather (cited in Lee, et al., 1981), found no sex differences in perceptions of educational experiences. Lee et al. (1981), found that female international students attached a greater importance to needs regarding: academic planning, facilitating coursework, goals beyond the degree, and anticipated post-return needs for material rewards (i.e., jobs, salaries and housing upon returning home).

The purpose of the present study was to explore differences in needs and perceptions between male and female undergraduate international students.

Method

All incoming undergraduate international students (N=96: 52% male, 48% female) attending a required fall orientation completed a written questionnaire. The sample included students from South East Asia (54%), the Middle East (20%), Europe (10%), Latin America (5%), Africa (4%), and other (6%). In order to investigate sex differences, 43 items related to perceptions and 25 items related to career and academic needs were analyzed, using multivariate analysis (MANOVA) at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Sex differences were found on several items related to self perceptions and career and academic needs. Table 1 summarizes the significant results of the MANOVA and gives items, means and standard deviations for both groups.

In terms of self perceptions, females, compared to males, expected to have a harder time adjusting to the University of Maryland, College Park, indicated they were more easily discouraged when things did not work out, saw themselves less likely to act on strong beliefs, and were less likely to feel they are viewed as leaders. No significant sex differences were found on items related to perceptions of the University, perceptions of family and friends, and perceptions of sex roles. Both male and female international undergraduates had a generally positive view of the University, and both groups felt they received support from family and friends for being at school and adjusting to the University. Results further suggested that the international undergraduate males and females held similar views regarding sex roles; views which appeared to be neither obviously conservative or liberal positions.

The results indicated a career need difference between males and females. Females indicated a greater need to talk to a counselor about career plans than did males. No other significant differences were found in the items assessing needs for career exploration, work experience, self-exploration, or job seeking skills, although both groups indicated moderate needs in these areas.

Significant differences were found on two academic needs items. Females, expressed a greater need to become more comfortable in speaking up in class and and taking better class notes than did males. Males and females were similar in expressing moderate needs in the areas of general study skills, writing skills and academic advising. Additionally, no significant sex differences were found

on needs concerning test anxiety, library use, math skills and math anxiety, and school activities, with both males and females indicating weak needs in these areas.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate there are differences in perceptions and needs of male and female international undergraduate students. Looking first at perceptions, differences were found in the way female and male international students see themselves. Overall, results suggest that females as a group question their self-efficacy, while males do not. While a possible explanation for female international undergraduates expecting to have a harder time at school, being more easily discouraged, not acting on beliefs, and not seeing themselves viewed as leaders might be attributed to lack of selfconfidence, it is also possible that these perceptions stem from a realistic assessment of the fit between the university environment and females. That is, it may well be that the university setting is not "naturally" geared to provide conditions in which female international students can feel efficacious.

As Story (1982) points out, values such as autonomy and self-assertiveness inherent in the theories of college student development, may be in conflict with the values of certain international students. Thus, while the academic community may be pushing the international student in a way considered facilitative of growth, the female student may feel as though she is having to swim upstream against a current of opposing values, new ideas, and differing goals. And the farther the student is from holding the values of the mainstream, the harder the swim; which may be the case for the female international undergraduate.

The finding that male international undergraduates did not evidence the same perceptions of more limited self-efficacy on the university campus suggests that, in some areas, sex may be a more powerful influencing variable than being a "foreign" student. It has been pointed out in the literature on U.S. students that females show less self-efficacy and self-assertiveness than males, and the present study suggests that the socialization process based on sex may be world-wide. One implication from these findings is that it may be useful to consider research and programming which includes both female students from the United States and female international undergraduates.

The sex differences in needs which were found supported the findings of Lee et al. (1981), who found that females expressed a higher level of needs. Considering the differences found in self perceptions, this difference in needs is not surprising. One would expect, and perhaps even hope, that the person expecting to have a harder time in school would also express a greater number of needs.

Overall, the findings suggest that while all international undergraduates indicated a need for assistance in some areas of study skills and in career development, females were particularly interested in career counseling. However, as noted by Sue & Sue (1977), international students tend to be reluctant to initiate a counseling relationship. This may be particularly critical to meeting the needs of international undergraduates as counseling centers are often the major vehicle for study skills and career services. Therefore, as previously suggested (Manese, Leong & Sedlacek, (1985), an introduction to counseling services and continual staff outreach may be particularly important for international students. Prime ways for reaching international students could be at their initial orienta-

tion to school, through groups and organizations in which they may be involved, or through the student center(s) in which international students congregate most frequently.

The greater interest in career counseling expressed by female international students is compatible with several trends noted in the literature on female students in general. Mason-Sowell and Sedlacek (1984) found an increase in vocational orientation of female freshmen over thirteen years, but no corresponding increase for male freshmen.

Boulle'-Lauria, Sedlacek and Waldo (1985) have shown that more women are entering college with majors which are nontraditional for women, and they are persisting in those majors. However, Martinez, Sedlacek and Bachhuber (1984) report that about three-quarters of women baccalaureate level graduates are still finding employment in traditional areas, and these same female graduates express more interest in post-graduation career counseling than do males.

The picture that presents itself is one of change in orientation, but some confusion, and possibly thwarted ambitions , among women in college these days. Female international students are likely caught up in this process, which is further exacerbated by their being from another country.

In conclusion, a few points are highlighted. First, although international students in general share some commonalities, there appear to be differences among subgroups of these students. Thus, investigating international students more specifically, taking into account other variables such as sex and standing (undergraduate vs. graduate) is important for a more complete knowledge and

understanding of these students. Second, if those concerned with student development are to be effective when working with international students, it appears necessary to keep well informed of the research findings and literature concerning international students, and to modify and develop approaches and programs for working with this diverse group of students. Thus we need to know a great deal more about international students; and further research, particularly that which explores subgroup differences among international students, should prove useful.

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Table 1

Differences* Between Female and Male Undergraduate International Students

ITEM	FEMALE Mean**	S.D.	MALE Mean**	S.D.
1. I get discouraged easily when I try to do something and it doesn't work out.	2.59	1.01	3.26	.81
2. In a group where I am comfortable, often I am looked to as a leader.	3.25	.87	2.86	1.01
3. I expect to have a harder time than most students at UMCP.	2.81	.93	3.35	.73
4. When I believe strongly in something, I act on it.	2.20	1.11	1.77	.72
5. I need to talk to a counselor about my career plans.	3.38	.71	3.02	.86
6. I need to become more comfortable in speaking up in class.	3.31	.69	2.91	1.02
7. I need to take better notes in class.	3.13	.93	2.73	.77

* Significant at .05, using MANOVA

** For items 1 to 4: 1 = Strongly agree, 5 = Strongly disagree;
for items 5-7: 1 = No need, 4 = Strong need.